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HAITI TODAY

Street scene, Port-au-Prince

HAITI IS ONE OF THE LARGEST MISSIONARY dioceses of the Episcopal Church. The Church, active there for almost one hundred years, has grown and developed along with the country, and today gives important leadership to the people.

Haiti shares the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic and lies halfway between Cuba and Puerto Rico. Columbus touched it on his first voyage, and soon afterwood the Spanish conquerors came and settled in the eastern part of the island. Harsh treatment soon killed off

the Indian population of the entire island, and when the French came later to settle in the unoccupied western part, they found it necessary to import large numbers of slaves from Africa to work their huge plantations. It was these slaves, who, rebelling against their cruel treatment, took advantage of the confusion of the French Revolution and overthrew their white rulers and 150 years ago on January 1, 1854, set up their own republic.

The French had brought with them the Roman Catholicism of their home land, but they did not encourage Christianization or education of their slaves. For the most part these people clung to the superstitious beliefs brought with them from Africa. It is this that has developed into the present-day voodoo, a strange mixture of superstition and Christianity. Under the new Republic, although the Roman Church remained strong, Protestant Churches were invited to share in the religious instruction of the country. Even though the Roman Church today continues to be partially supported by the State, freedom of religion has been maintained.

A National Church for Haiti

In 1861 the Episcopal Church went to Haiti. The Rev. James T. Holly, a Negro priest of the Church in the United States, emigrated with a group of about 110 American Negroes in the hope of establishing a colony in this country. Though the colony failed, the Church found fertile ground for its work: Mr. Holly found here a "society where neither public morality nor religion have yet firmly taken root." In 1874,

the Church in Haiti was recognized as a national Church under the name *Eglise Orthodoxe Apostolique Haitienne*, and on November 8 of that year, Mr. Holly was consecrated its first bishop.

After Bishop Holly's death in 1911, the Haitian Church requested that it be made a missionary district of the Episcopal Church of the United States. This change was put into effect two years later. In 1923 the first missionary bishop, the Rt. Rev. Harry Roberts Carson, was consecrated. Under him, the Haitian clergy continued their work; and during the twenty years of his leadership, the Church continued to grow. A good deal of construction was completed during this period, including Holy Trinity Cathedral, the Convent of the Sisters of St. Margaret, Grace Merritt Stewart School for girls, and the Bishop's House, all in Port-au-Prince (the capital), in addition to several small churches in the smaller towns.

A Growing Church

THE present bishop is the Rt. Rev. C. Alfred Voegeli. Born and educated in New Jersey, he was ordained to the diaconate and priesthood at St. Peter's Church, Morristown, N. J., in 1933. A decade later he relinquished his post as dean of St. Luke's Cathedral, Ancon, Canal Zone, to be consecrated second Missionary Bishop of Haiti. With unusual insight into the needs of the Haitian people and the place of the Episcopal Church, he has been able to create even greater strength and unity in the work in Haiti.

At present the only American clergy in addi-

Choir, Holy Trinity Cathedral, Port-au-Prince

tion to the Bishop are the dean of the theological seminary and the priest in charge of the English-speaking congregation at the Cathedral. The latter also teaches part-time at the seminary. There are twenty Haitian clergymen to carry on the work among the 46,000 baptized persons and 13,000 communicants. This membership is distributed among Holy Trinity Cathedral and the smaller Epiphany Church in the capital, and more than seventy missions scattered throughout the country. Both large towns and mountain villages have Episcopal churches. The facilities

for worship range from recently constructed churches, which are slowly being built one by one, to mere shelters made of palm branches. Outside of the capital, each priest is usually in charge of a town parish and several outlying missions.

The work among the country missions is made difficult by the mountainous terrain and lack of roads. The mountains, while permitting the nation a wide range of agricultural products, are a great hindrance to transportation and communication. Paved roads lead out from the capital several miles in each direction; but beyond, except for short stretches near the principal towns, only dusty, rough, dirt roads connect the principal centers. But even these poor roads do not lead into the mountains, and transportation must then be on foot or horseback. A mission only five miles away may require five hours to reach.

While in the capital and other large towns there are modern developments, in the country and mountain districts the people still live on the most simple level. Farming methods are those of a century ago. The peasants walk miles to market carrying their baskets of produce on their heads or at best loaded on a small burro. Haiti's economy is based largely on the exportation of its agricultural products, coffee, sugar, bananas, and sisal. Manufactured goods must be imported. Large plantations no longer exist, and the many small farms scarcely give subsistence to the peasant farmer.

It is the spirt of the Haitian, though, which invites and encourages the work of the Church.

He remains cheerful, warmhearted, and gay despite his hardships. That strength which permitted the Haitian Negro to be the first to free himself from slavery is present today as the country struggles to overcome its handicaps.

Leadership: The Problem

THE Church is laying great stress on the training of its future leaders, for the problem of the Church as well as of the country is one of leadership. In a country where there is so much poverty and superstition, the Church has a heroic task in ministering to the physical, economic, educational, and spiritual needs of its people.

The Haitian clergy receive their complete theological training in their island republic. Most of the work of the four-year course is carried on in English, as materials in French are scanty. This is quite an accomplishment for young men whose previous schooling has been in French and to whom the local *patois*, Creole, is the language of everyday conversation. The seminary recently moved out of the capital to a more suitable location on the coast about fifty miles to the northwest, close to the village of Mont Rouis. The facilities are still rustic, more like those of a summer camp in the United States; in fact, they are used for the Boy and Girl Scout camps in the summer.

The Church maintains as many schools as possible. Outside of Port-au-Prince, about forty small schools give primary education to close to twelve hundred children. In the capital, at Grace Merritt Stewart School, more than two hundred girls receive their primary schooling. It is hoped

that soon a secondary school may be organized in the capital to meet the great need for higher education which our Church could give its young people.

Murals for the Cathedral

One recent piece of work has attracted attention of the international secular world to the Church in Haiti. As a part of an amazing renaissance in art which has developed here in the past ten years, Bishop Voegeli asked in 1950 that murals be painted in the Cathedral by local artists. Now these striking and vivid murals cover the walls of the apse and small chapels and eventually are to be completed along the walls of the nave. Incidentally, this art work has made the handsome Episcopal Cathedral a must for the many American tourists who visit Port-au-Prince.

The Sisters of St. Margaret, since 1927, have played an important role in the work of the Church. These four American women now have charge of Grace Merritt Stewart School, the Altar Bread Department, and St. Vincent's School for Handicapped Children. At the latter school, about seventy blind, deaf, and crippled children are cared for and trained who might otherwise be abandoned, for this is Haiti's only such school.

The Church in Haiti, largely dependent upon the Church in the United States, is actively ministering the redemptive power of Christ in what all Haitians know is *Haiti Chérie*.

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